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Review of previous study on merits of semester and quarter systems, status of quarter system at institutions resembling Stanford; other data on calendar plans, with arguments for and against each system.

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COMMITTEE OF EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY

"INTERIM REPORT ON THE SEMESTER AND QUARTER SYSTEMS"

May 26, 1955

I. INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1917-18 Stanford operated on a semester calendar. This calendar, like that concurrently in use at the University of California, was unusual in that the fall term began shortly before the end of August and ended before Christmas (see Table 8, F), thus avoiding one of the most often cited weaknesses of the semester system, the occurrence of the Christmas vacation near the end of the fall term, followed by a two or three week "lame duck" session and an examination period.

Since 1917-18 Stanford has operated on the Quarter System. The Committee of Educational Inquiry, in a working arrangement with the Committee for the Study of Undergraduate Education, has undertaken to reexamine the comparative merits of the quarter and semester systems. The present interim report represents a first step in the appraisal, in which the relative prevalence of the two systems and certain opinions about their merits are summarized.

II. PREVIOUS STUDY AT STANFORD (CATHCART COMMITTEE)

The Committee has at hand for study reports of various similar inquiries at Stanford and elsewhere. The previous Stanford study was undertaken by a Subcommittee of the Academic Council (A. M. Cathcart, Chairman) (see Bibliography) at the request of the School of Social Sciences on March 30, 1932, and the recommendations reported to the Academic Council on March 8, 1933. This Subcommittee, subsequently to be referred to as the Cathcart Committee, ascertained departmental opinions about the quarter system by means of letters to department heads and also invited expressions of opinion from individual faculty members. The departments fell into the following categories:

For the retention of the quarter system	For the return to a semester system	No preference
Bacteriology	Anatomy	English
Botany	History	Geology
Graduate School of Business	Mechanical Engineering	Physics
Chemistry	Philosophy	Political Science
Civil Engineering	Psychology	
Economics		
Education		
German		
Journalism		
Law		
Mathematics		
Mining Engineering		
Physiology		
Romanic Languages		
Zoology		
Total 15	5	4

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The Cathcart Committee stated (pp. 2-3), "These departmental opinions are not matters of mere a priori opinion, although such opinion doubtless plays some part. They are based for the most part on actual experience. That experience is a fact

of vital importance upon whichever side it is found. For that reason the fact that the number of departments favoring the retention of the quarter system so far exceeds the number in opposition seems to us to cast a rather heavy burden of proof upon those favoring a return to the semester system."

It should be pointed out that considerations involving the summer quarter played a large part in the thought of the Cathcart Committee and of the departments. The summer quarter was equivalent in length to the other quarters and was staffed largely by regular members of the faculty. Stanford thus operated on a four quarter system rather than three regular quarters plus a summer quarter of reduced offerings. Accordingly, some arguments then elaborated would not apply to Stanford at present. Nor would it, in all probability, be currently supposed, as it was in 1933, that the summer quarter is of great importance in attracting graduate students to the departments generally.

The Cathcart Committee mentioned the supposed advantages of each system. These, except for the economic arguments, are summarized in abbreviated form below:

For the Quarter System	Against the Quarter System
Faculty	
Greater possibility of accumulating time for research, writing, or travel.	Summer teaching[1] interferes with writing and research.
Students	
May get degrees in 3 years by attending summer quarters.[2]	Sequential course offerings difficult to arrange because of faculty quarters off during the regular year to enable them to participate in summer teaching.[1]
Students teaching elsewhere may get advanced degrees by attending summers only.[3]	Late ending of the quarter system disadvantageous for students seeking employment.
More effective check on student athletes.	
Students can more easily adjust to interruptions of education owing to illness, accident, or opportunity for travel.	
Opportunities for students to drop out for only a quarter for work.	
A program of 3 or 4 courses, rather than 5 or 6 as in the semester system, is advantageous for learning.	Courses covered at too rapid a rate in a short period; disadvantageous for learning and thinking about subject matter. Too much fragmentation of subject matter.
Frequent examinations are a desirable stimulus to student application.	Too frequent examinations are disadvantageous to students.

1. This was a possible objection, since regular staff members were called upon to do summer teaching at the expense of some other quarter; no longer applicable except in the School of Education.
2. No longer true in all departments at Stanford.
3. No longer true, except possibly in the School of Education and some departments.

For the Quarter System	Against the Quarter System
Students (Cont'd.)	
Avoids the serious interruptions of the Christmas and Easter vacations.[5]	Too much time devoted to starting and stopping.
	Quarter system requires 50% more time per year in registration, advising, record keeping, and examinations.[4]
Institution as a whole	
Full summer quarter attracts graduate students. "The quarter system has been a great and decisive factor in the development of graduate work at Stanford." (p. 20)[6]	Quarter system requires more staff in the Registrar's office and is more expensive.

The Cathcart Committee recommended continuance of the quarter system.

III. THE CURRENT STUDY

The present Committee has gathered factual material and opinions from other comparable institutions about the quarter system for presentation to the faculty. The final report will probably include results of student and faculty opinion polls along with summarized opinions of administrators and departments.

Table 1 summarizes the status of the quarter system at institutions that resemble Stanford in having been fully accredited during the period of study, in granting the Ph. D. as well as bachelor's degrees, and in having enrollments of 2500 or more students. It will be noted that during the period two institutions, Colorado and North Carolina, have adopted the semester system, while two, Northwestern and Georgia Institute of Technology, have adopted the quarter system, and one, Washington, has shifted from quarter to semester and back to the quarter system.

As the comments indicate, there are differences among the twenty universities on the quarter system. In 14 no change is contemplated at present. In the remaining 6 (Iowa State College, North Carolina Agricultural College, Northwestern, Oregon, Stanford, and Vanderbilt) the possibility of shifting to a semester system is at least being considered.

Table 2, drawn up on the same basis as Table 1, simply lists the comparable universities that have been on the semester system continuously since 1939.

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4. This objection neglects to take into account the summer quarter, but the quarter system is undoubtedly more expensive to operate.

5. The former Stanford semester system avoided the Christmas break, but the statement applies to the usual semester system.

6. In this connection the Cathcart Committee added a comment that reflects an attitude toward undergraduate education at Stanford that has probably changed markedly since (p. 20), "....if there is any one feature of Stanford's educational policy that stands out more clearly than another it is that, whatever may be done about the work of undergraduates the University will continue to welcome and encourage graduate students." The point made is doubtless not currently applicable except possibly in the School of Education.

Table 3 summarizes the current calendars of the 90 institutions that make up the selected list. American University (enrollment 4,135) and the University of Cincinnati (enrollment 12,454) are the instituions on the trimester system.

Table summarizes the calendar plans during the period selected for study. It is obvious that there is no pronounced trend toward any of the three systems.

Table 5 shows the distribution of calendars at selected West Coast colleges. The State colleges are listed as one institution, as are the several branches of the University of California.

Table 6 is a self-explanatory summary of different selected lists of institutions on the semester and quarter plans.

Table 7 shows the distribution of course offerings according to the number of units at Stanford under the semester system in 1916-17 and the quarter system in 1930-31 and the spring of 1955. According to the Cathcart Committee it was hoped that the adoption of the quarter system would bring about a reduction in the number of one and two unit courses. To a certain extent this hope has been realized for the one and two unit courses taken together dropped from 45.2% under the semester system in 1916-17 to 24.6% by 1930-31, and to only 18.1% by the spring of 1955.

Table 8 compares the time used for registration, class meetings, and examinations under several different calendars. It should be noted that Princeton has a six day midterm examination period in addition to the final examinations. It is obvious that approximately the same number of class days per year can be obtained in either system. Judging by the Ohio State pattern, it is possible to achieve more uniformity in the length of quarters than has been achieved at Stanford in recent years.

IV. ARGUMENTS

The customary arguments (see Appendix A) for or against the quarter or semester systems are repeatedly encountered in the reports of previous studies. The same arguments are advanced in some instances in favor of each of the systems, i.e., that one or the other is more favorable for learning or for reflective thought, etc.; that the avoidance of a break at Christmas is an advantage under the quarter system, or that it is no particular disadvantage under the semester system, etc. We have found no reports of special studies that give any empirical evidence of educational superiority of one system over the other. The supposed advantages of either lie almost entirely in the realm of opinion reinforced by familiarity. Our Committee has gained the impression that the general dissatisfaction with accomplishments of students under either system leads to the hope that there will be improvement under the other.[1] This point is reflected in the words of President O. C. Aderhold of the University of Georgia (personal communication), "My observation is that if you have the quarter system you wish you had the semester, and if you have the semester you wish you had the quarter." Custom and experience play a role in faculty and student attitudes as exemplified by the following statement by President J. Roscoe Miller of Northwestern (personal communication), "I am of the opinion that those

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1. Our Committee made no effort to find out the attitudes of institutions on the semester system, other than to inquire about the plans of the University of California. Mr. George Pettit, Assistant to the President, reported in a telephone conversation that the Committee that studied possible calendar changes this year, recommended that the vacation in the spring semester be made to coincide with Easter rather than to break the term into more or less equal parts. The Committee has been continued and asked to examine the possibility of adopting the quarter system.

who have worked under the quarter system give it preference; those who are more familiar with the semester system, the same.... and never the twain shall meet."

It is apparent that certain defects often attributed to the one or other system are not inherent in either. Opponents of the quarter commonly assume that that system allows fewer class days per year and requires more time for examinations. This is not necessarily so (see Table 8).

Another assumption sometimes made is that the number of one and two unit courses is greater on the quarter system and that the adoption of a semester system will necessarily reduce the offerings of short courses. The University of Colorado Committee (January 10, 1950) reported that there were 2,263 separate courses being offered in the various schools and colleges and stated, "Many of these courses are one, two, and three hour, one quarter offerings --- an assortment of small courses not at all consistent with a true quarter plan and not possible, at least to such an extent, when a school is on the semester basis." It will be recalled that the Cathcart Committee at Stanford cited a similar argument against the semester system. What happened in fact with the adoption of the quarter system was, as already pointed out, a considerable decrease in the number of one and two unit courses, precisely the opposite of the expectations of the Colorado Committee (Table 7).

In a similar way, the usual criticism of the semester system is based on the undesirability of interruption at Christmas and again, although at a more favorable time in the term, at Easter. The semester plans at California and Stanford in the early part of the Century avoided both of these difficulties, the first by beginning early and completing the fall semester before Christmas, the second by scheduling the Spring vacation about the middle of the semester without regard to the date of Easter. Whether a return to such a system would be possible or desirable ought to be considered.

What is not generally realized is that both quarter systems and semester systems differ widely among themselves. What some term the "true quarter system" means a student load of three five-unit courses per quarter in contrast to a semester system with a load of five three-unit courses per semester. Others would define a "true quarter system" as a system in which there are four equal quarters in the year and in which courses are regularly rotated in the summer quarters so that it is possible to obtain college or graduate degrees by summer attendance only or to receive the undergraduate degree in three years of continuous attendance. This was the system at Stanford in the 1930s and, to a limited extent (with reduced course offerings) up to the present. In 1954 an eight week summer term was offered, although some courses ran ten weeks. Currently, the principal summer term is eight weeks, but terms of one, two, and eleven weeks are also offered (personal communication from Harvey Hall, Registrar. See Appendix B). The full four quarter program described above is in operation at several midwestern schools: Chicago, Ohio State, Minnesota.

The quarter system is commonly blamed for excessive fragmentation of subject matter into small packets. From the above discussion, it is obvious that this is not inherent in the system, but depends upon the practice of the institution. If quarter courses of five units are standard, as they were, for example, at the University of North Carolina before the shift to the semester plan, then a semester plan forces a student to take more rather than fewer courses during his four years. According to Chancellor R. B. House (personal communication), one of the problems resulting from the shift to the semester system was the increase in the number of courses required for graduation from 36 to 40. He cites another difficulty, the three unit semester course has 45 class meetings per year in contrast to 50 for the five unit course under the quarter system, thus necessitating some curtailment of individual course content.

Courses extending over more than one term are possible under either system. If a semester course is more desirable in a particular subject matter than a quarter course, then perhaps a two quarter course is still more desirable. Or a year course may be offered as is commonly the practice on the East Coast. These possibilities were pointed out by both the Colchcart and the University of Minnesota Committees and are virtually realized in some courses at Stanford (see Appendix A).

Possibly the commonest argument against the quarter system is that directed against the expense incurred in making three starts and stops rather than two in the regular academic year. There is no question but that the quarter system is in this respect somewhat more expensive for the Registrar's office. Our Committee, following the suggestion of the Minnesota Committee, thinks that the possibility of registration for a full year should be explored, regardless of whether the quarter system is retained or not. For most students it might be possible to plan the entire year's program if time schedules were available for the year instead of for one quarter at a time. Students would register for the year and only reregister in case of change of program. Such a system might substantially reduce the expense and loss of time inherent in the present mode of registration for each quarter.

In summary, our Committee has gained the impression from study of various reports that college faculties often overlook the variety and flexibility within either system and tend to hold stereotyped views of what the systems are. It is interesting to note that in the studies available to us little notice is taken of the empirical fact that distinguished educational institutions manage to operate on either system. Four out of six of the Western Conference universities are on the quarter system, but there is no objective evidence to show that the educational effectiveness of the different institutions hinges on a particular system of dividing up the year.

In view of the conditions described above, it seems to this Committee that before local opinions are gathered from the faculty or various administrative units, it would be desirable to define with care exactly what type of quarter or semester system is being considered (see p. 5). Our Committee welcomes the opportunity to discuss the study with the Advisory Board of the Committee for the Study of Undergraduate Education and to hear suggestions for the next steps that might be made before the preparation of the final report.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge with thanks the help of Professor W. H. Cowley, who discussed with us the general plan of the report and gave valuable aid in the selection of material for inclusion in the tables; Dr. Harvey Hall, Registrar, for lending us material from his files; Dr. E. C. Wagner, Assistant Registrar, for obtaining for us the raw data used for the preparation of Table 7; and the numerous officials of other universities who responded to our letters without exception and, when possible, sent copies of studies made at their own institutions.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Committee of Educational Inquiry
Graham DuShane (Chairman)
William C. Bark
Aurelio M. Espinosa, Jr.
George S. Parks

May 26, 1955

TABLE 1

ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS CURRENTLY OR RECENTLY ON THE QUARTER SYSTEM[1]

Institution	Enrollment[2] 1952-53	Year 1939[3]	1947[3]	1951[3]	1955[4]	Comment
Chicago, U. of	6,470	Q	Q	Q	Q	No studies in progress; no change contemplated.
Colorado, U. of	7,935	Q	Q	S	S	"..the semester plan has worked very well."
Denver, U. of	6,127	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study made in 1952-53; recommendation: the quarter system should be retained.
Emory University	2,894	Q	Q	Q	Q	No studies in progress; no change contemplated.
Georgia Inst.of Tech.	3,764	S	Q	Q	Q	No change contemplated.
Georgia, U. of	8,521	Q	Q	Q	Q	No studies in progress; no change contemplated.
Iowa State College	7,757	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study in 1952; change to semester system recommended; faculty voted for retention of quarter system.
Michigan State College	13,903	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study in 1951; recommendation: the quarter system should be retained.
Minnesota, U. of	18,806	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study in 1952-53; retention and improvement of quarter system recommended.
North Carolina, Agr. & Tech. Col. of	4,365	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study currently underway.
North Caroline, U. of	5,474	Q	Q	Q	S	Semester system adopted in fall of 1953 mainly to regain Saturday classes.[5]
Northwestern U.	18,443	S	Q	Q	Q	In recent faculty votes, the quarter system has won out by a narrow margin.
Ohio State U.	18,600	Q	Q	Q	Q	Several studies since quarter system was adopted in 1921; no change contemplated.

Institution	Enrollment[2] 1952-53	Year 1939[3]	1947[3]	1951[3]	1955[4]	Comment
Oregon State College	4,911	Q	Q	Q	Q	Change not seriously considered since all eight institutions of the state system are on the quarter system.
Orevon, U. of	4,780	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study in 1948; no change recommended, but faculty voted 72 to 71 for semester plan; not conclusive enough to justify change while other state institutions remain on quarter system.
Stanford U.	7,237	Q	Q	Q	Q	Study in 1933; retention of quarter system recommended; current study being made.
Tennessee, U. of	7,859	Q	Q	Q	Q	No change contemplated.
Utah State Agr. College	3,874	Q	Q	Q	Q	No change contemplated. State schools on quarter system.
Utah, U. of	7,600	Q	Q	Q	Q	No change contemplated; State schools on quarter system.
Vanderbilt U.	2,926	Q	Q	Q	Q	Change to a semester system favored, but joint enrollment of some students in George Peabody College for Teachers (on the quarter system) inhibits change; change probable in the future.
Virginia Polytech. Inst.	3,066	Q	Q	Q	Q	No change contemplated.
Washington, U. of	13,072	Q	Q	Q	Q	Quarter system from 1918-1943; semester system to adjust to Navy V-12 program from 1944-1946; return to quarter system in 1946.[6]

TABLE 1 FOOTNOTES

1. This list is made up of those institutions that had 1952-53 enrollments of 2,500 or more; granted Ph. D. degrees as well as undergraduate degrees (as listed in Robert C. Story: Earned degrees conferred by higher educational institutions 1950-51. Circular No. 333. Federal Security Agency. 1952.); and were fully accredited throughout the period of study (as listed in the appropriate editions of American Colleges and Universities.) See footnote 3.

2. Enrollment figures are from: Education Directory 1953-54. Part 3. Higher Education. U S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. 1953.

3. The calendars for 1939, 1947, and 1951 are drawn from the following: Marsh, C. S. American Universities and Colleges. 4th Ed., American Council on Education. 1940.

   Brumbaugh, A. J. Ibid. 5th Ed., 1948.

   Irwin, Mary. Ibid. 6th Ed., 1952.

4. The current status (1955) and the comments are based on correspondence.

5. Chancellor R. B. House, University of North Carolina, in a letter dated February 19, 1955, stated, "I believe that, aside from the problem of extended week-ends, both Faculty and students would prefer to have the quarter system because of the concentration of work on fewer subjects and the longer period of time each week free from scheduled duty. The present arrangement has been accepted in goot spirit, however, and I now think that we shall continue on the present basis indefinitely.

6. President Henry Schmitz, University of Washington, in a letter dated February 14, 1955, quoted a memorandum from the Registrar as follows," '6. I feel, from the Registrar's Office viewpoint, that, for practical purposes the semester system is preferable to the quarter for the reasons stated in 4 [added load and expense of the quarter system]. Having had the experience of converting from the quarter to the semester system and back, I feel that whatever change is made will result in confusion and an added financial burden. Unless the faculty is almost unanimous in making the change it would seem a rather unwise step. Our conversion was forced on us by war conditions, and I do not believe that it would ever have been made otherwise.'"

TABLE 2

INSTITUTIONS CONTINUOUSLY ON THE SEMESTER SYSTEM SINCE 1939.

Institution	Enrollment 1952-53
Arizona, University of	5,054
Boston University	16,143
Bradley University	3,156
Brooklyn, Polytechnical Institute of	5,903
Brown University	3,081
Buffalo, University of	9,177
California, University of	33,770
Carnegie Institute of Technology	2,842
Catholic University of America	3,415
Columbia University	25,119
Connecticut, University of	7,363
Cornell University	9,371
Delaware, University of	2,505
Duke University	4,666
Florida, University of	9,206
Fordham University	9,089
Georgetown University	4,812
George Washington University	9,135
Harvard University	10,156
Hawaii, University of	4,648
Illinois, University of	20,804
Indiana University	16,948
Iowa, State University of	7,213
Johns Hopkins University	6,822
Kansas State College	5,035
Kansas, University of	6,729
Kentucky, University of	5,580
Lehigh University	3,090
Louisiana State University	7,053
Loyola University (Chicago)	6,543
Maryland, University of	13,163
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	4,979
Massachusetts, University of	3,451
Michigan, University of	17,002
Missouri, University of	8,064
Nebraska, University of	6,707
New Mexico, University of	4,066
New York University	41,307
Notre Dame, University of	5,163
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College	8,958
Oklahoma, University of	8,608
Pennsylvania State College	12,815
Pennsylvania, University of	14,885
Pittsburgh, University of	14,914
Princeton University	3,473
Purdue University	10,481

Institution	Enrollment 1952-53
Rensselear Polytechnical Institute	3,010
Rochester, University of	4,265
Rutgers University	6,509
St. Johns University	6,352
St. Louis University	7,856
Southern California, University of	10,571
Syracuse University	14,550
Temple University	10,221
Texas, Agricultural and Mechanical College of	6,277
Texas, University of	14,128
Tufts College	3,356
Tulane University	6,047
Virginia[1], University of	3,311
Washington, State College of	5,036
Washington University	10,439
Wayne University	16,429
Western Reserve University	9,490
West Virginia, University of	4,880
Wisconsin, University of	15,626
Yale University	7,567

1. The University of Virginia shifted from a year session to a semester system during World War II.

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF INSTITUTIONS ON SEMESTER, QUARTER PLANS,

AND TRIMESTER PLANS IN 1951

(Enrollments as of 1952-53)

Plan	Institution		Enrollment		
	Number	%	Number	%	Mean
Semester	66	73.4	608,882	75.8	9225.5
Quarter	22	24.4	178,394	22.1	8108.8
Trimester	2	2.2	16,589	2.1	8294.5
Total (Mean)	90	100.0	803,865	100.0	(8931.8)

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF CALENDAR PLANS 1939 - 1955

Plan	Institution 1939		Institution 1947		Institution 1955*	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Semester	70	77.8	66	73.4	68	75.6
Quarter	20	22.2	22	24.4	20	22.2
Trimester	0	0.0	2	2.2	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0	90	100.0	90	100.0

*Information obtained by correspondence or telephone.

TABLE 5

NON-SECTARIAN, 4-YEAR ACCREDITED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ON THE WEST COAST (Data from Mary Irwin, 1952)

Institution	Calendar
California	
California Institute of Technology	Q
Claremont Men's College	S
College of the Pacific	S
Mills College	S
Occidental College	S
Pacific Union College	Q
Pasadena College	S
Pomona College	S
Scripps College	S
Stanford	Q
University of California	S
California State Colleges	S
University of Redlands	S
University of Southern California	S
Whittier College	S
Oregon	
Cascade College	Q
Lewis and Clark College	S
Linfield College	S
Oregon State College	Q
Pacific University	S
Reed College	S
University of Oregon	Q
University of Portland	S
Willamette University	S
Washington	
College of Puget Sound	S
Pacific Lutheran College	S
Seattle Pacific College	Q
State College of Washington	S
University of Washington	Q
Walla Walla College	Q
Whitman College	S
Whitworth College	S

SUMMARY

	Institution Number	%
Semester	23	72
Quarter	9	28
Total	32	100

TABLE 6

DISTRIBUTION OF CALENDARS AS DETERMINED IN OTHER STUDIES

A. Teachers' Colleges and Schools and Departments of Education which are Members of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. (Data - Brown, 1952)

Plan	Institution Number	%
Semester	158	68.7
Quarter	72	31.3
Total	230	100.0

B. Publicly Supported Colleges and Universities, Exclusive of Teachers' Colleges (Senate Committee of the University of Colorado, Jan. 10, 1950)

Plan	Institution Number	%
Semester	112	70
Quarter	41	25
Mixed	7	4
Total	160	100

C. The State Universities (Senate Committee of the University of Colorado, January 10, 1950)

Plan	Institution Number	%
Semester	32	74
Quarter	11	26
Total	43	100

D. Minnesota Colleges and Universities (Interim Report of the Subcommittee Studying the Semester vs. the Quarter System, January 8, 1953)

Plan	Institution Number	%
Semester	19	59.4
Quarter	13	40.6
Total	32	100.0

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF COURSES GIVEN AT STANFORD
(Omitting School of Business, School of Medicine, Military Training, Music and Physical Training.*)

	1916-17		1930-31		Spring, 1955	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
One-unit	36	6.5	55	5.2	38	4.3
Two-unit	214	38.7	202	19.4	121	13.8
Three-unit	225	40.7	371	35.6	375	42.6
Four-unit	49	8.8	197	18.8	185	21.0
Five-unit	28	5.0	216	20.7	152	17.3
Six-unit or more	0	0	0	0	10	1.1
Total	552		1041		881	

* Data for 1916-17 and 1930-31 from the Cathcart report to the Academic Council, March 8, 1933; that for the Spring, 1955 compiled from data furnished by the Registrar. In English, Foreign Languages and Western Civilization each section that is separately numbered is counted as a separate course (7 courses in first year German, 77 courses in Western Civilization, etc.); certain schools and departments are omitted in order to make the Table conform to that in the Cathcart report.

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF VARIOUS CALENDARS

Year	Quarter	Days: Registration		Classes		Examinations		Total
A. STANFORD QUARTER SYSTEM								
1954-55	Autumn	2		61		5		
	Winter	1		58		5		
	Spring	1		63		5		
	Total	4	+	182	+	15	=	201
1953-54	Autumn	2		61		5		
	Winter	1		58		5		
	Spring	1		57		5		
	Total	4	+	176	+	15	=	195
1952-53	Autumn	2		61		5		
	Winter	1		58		5		
	Spring	1		57		5		
	Total	4	+	176	+	15	=	195
1951-52	Autumn	2		61		5		
	Winter	1		61		5		
	Spring	1		57		5		
	Total	4	+	179	+	15	=	198
B. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO QUARTER SYSTEM								
1954-55	Autumn	2		69				
	Winter	2		64				
	Spring	2		63				
	Total	6	+	196	=			202
1953-54 (also 1952-53)	Autumn	2		69				
	Winter	2		64				
	Spring	2		63				
	Total	6	+	196	=			202

Table 8 - Comparison of Various Calendars (Cont'd.) Page 2

Year	Quarter		Days: Registration		Classes		Examination		Total
		C. OHIO STATE QUARTER SYSTEM							
1954-55	Autumn		1		61		5		
	Winter		1		58		5		
	Spring		1		58		5		
		Total	3	+	177	+	15	=	195
1953-54	Autumn		1		61		5		
	Winter		1		58		5		
	Spring		1		58		5		
		Total	3	+	177	+	15	=	195
1950-51	Autumn		1		61		5		
	Winter		1		57		5		
	Spring		1		58		5		
		Total	3	+	176	+	15	=	194
1948-49	Autumn		1		61		5		
	Winter		1		58		5		
	Spring		1		58		5		
		Total	3	+	177	+	15	=	195

Commencement - last day of examinations
Registration - open 2 months in advance.

D. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SEMESTER SYSTEM

1954-55	Fall		3		89		10		
	Spring		3		88		10		
		Total	6	+	177	+	20	=	203
1953-54	Fall		3		89		10		
	Spring		3		88		10		
		Total	6	+	177	+	20	=	203
1952-53	Fall		3		89		10		
	Spring		3		88		10		
		Total	6	+	177	+	20	=	203

Table 8 - Comparison of Various Calendars (Cont'd.) Page 3

Year	Quarter	Days: Registration		Classes		Examinations		Total
E. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY SEMESTER SYSTEM								
1954-55	Fall	1		80-1/2		6+12=18		
	Spring	1		81		6+12=18		
	Total	2	+	161-1/2	+	36	=	199-1/2
1953-54	Fall	1		81		6+12=18		
	Spring	1		81-1/2		6+12=18		
	Total	2	+	162-1/2	+	36	=	200-1/2
1952-53	Fall	1		80-1/2		6+12=18		
	Spring	1		82		6+12=18		
	Total	2	+	162-1/2	+	36	=	200-1/2
F. STANFORD SEMESTER SYSTEM, prior to 1917-18								
1916-17	Fall (Aug. 28-Dec. 20)	3		88		6		
	Spring (Jan. 8-May 21)	2		92		6		
	Total	5	+	180	+	12	=	197
1915-16	Fall (Aug. 30-Dec. 17)	3		85		6		
	Spring (Jan. 10-May 17)	2		91		6		
	Total	5	+	176	+	12	=	193
1914-15	Fall (Aug. 31-Dec. 18)	3		83		6		
	Spring (Jan. 4-May 12)	2		95		6		
	Total	5	+	178	+	12	=	195

TABLE 9

SUMMARY OF VARIOUS CALENDARS from Table 8)

Institution	Class Days		Total Days	
	Range	Average	Range	Average
Quarter Systems				
Stanford	176-182	178-1/4	195-201	197-1/4
Chicago	- -	- -	202-202	202
Ohio State	176-177	176-3/4	194-195	194-1/2
Semester Systems				
California	177-177	177	203-203	203
Princeton	161-1/2-162-1/2	162.2	199-1/2-201-1/2	200.2
Stanford	176-180	178	193-197	195

APPENDIX A.

The Customary Arguments about the Quarter and Semester Plans

The following represent a selected list of the claimed advantages and disadvantages of the two systems; no effort has been made to attribute them to particular sources, for most of them crop up repeatedly in the studies we have consulted. We depart from the usual treatment, which is simply to prepare separate lists and make no effort to judge whether or not the arguments have any general validity, by putting the arguments that bear on the same subject side by side when possible. Below those arguments that appear to us to be generally invalid, or invalid when applied to Stanford, we have inserted a commentary. Those that seem to be generally valid we have passed without comment.

Arguments for the Quarter System	Arguments for the Semester System
The full four quarter plan utilizes plant most effectively and enables students to progress rapidly toward degrees.	
Comment. True, but not fully applicable to Stanford at present. See body of report (p. 2).	
The greater frequency of terms permits readier evaluation of student progress and more frequent student counseling.	
A shift to a semester system would increase class size by 50% for those courses offered every quarter.	
A quarter system requires less class and laboratory space in simultaneous use, if the same number of separate courses are offered during the year under both systems.	
Comment. This point has not to our knowledge been considered by committees other than ours. It is an important point, especially for laboratory space. A change to a semester system would involve heavy capital expenditures.	
More frequent examinations stimulate better student performance.	Fewer examination periods per year are are advantageous to students.
Comment. Both arguments are of doubtful validity. No empirical studies are available. It can be questioned whether there are actually fewer examination periods under the semester system, inasmuch as it is customary to give two "midterms" in that system as opposed to one in the quarter system.	
	Less time devoted to examinations.
Comment. This statement is partly countered in the comment above, although it more usually refers to the supposed longer time per year devoted to endterm examinations under the quarter system. The data in Table 8 show that that assumption is not justified.	

Arguments for the Quarter System	Arguments for the Semester System
The opportunity to graduate at any one of three times per year is advantageous.	
	The earlier ending of the spring semester favors temporary or permanent employment.
Permits more frequent withdrawal and admission dates for students, an advantage to those who must withdraw to work or on account of illness, etc.	
More frequent class meetings favor education and help maintain student interest.	The longer length of time permits students to become oriented and adjusted to difficult subject matter or to become interested in a subject; maturation can take place.

Comment. There is no empirical evidence in favor of either view.

Student concentration on 3 or 4 subjects (rather than 5 to 7 as in the semester system) favors effective learning.	The longer term is more effective for mastery of subject matter.

Comment. These are matters of opinion. In some quarter systems students take a large number of one and two unit courses and hence the argument on the left would not apply. At Stanford, however, as shown in Table 7, the longer courses predominate.

	Instructors have a longer period of time to get acquainted with the students.

Comment. This seems to us questionnable and is probably in part based on an assumption that the quarter system courses meet the same number of times per week as semester courses. A five unit quarter course would meet 50 times in three months compared to its three unit counterpart in the semester system, which would meet 45 times in four months. Which time should be taken into account? The number of class meetings or the calendar time?

	The semester is a more favorable period for preparation of term papers and for extended reading in connection with courses.

Comment. This is a very general opinion and is probably valid to some extent. Two-quarter courses would avoid the criticism (see p. 6).

Vacation periods at Christmas and Easter do not break into the period of study.	The Christmas and Easter vacations permit reflective thought and maturation.

Comment. Whatever the validity of the argument on the left, it is most widely held by proponents of either system to be the greatest merit of the quarter system. The argument on the right was only encountered once in our survey and thus represents an uncommon view.

Allows greater flexibility in planning a course of studies; students wishing to change their programs may do so more readily.	The confusion attending the dropping and adding of courses during the early part of the term is one-third less per year.

Arguments for the Quarter System	Arguments for the Semester System
There is less tendency to pad course content in the quarter system.	Quarter length courses tend to become overloaded with materisl.
Comment. There is no method of checking the validity of these statements, but we doubt that either has any necessary validity. It seems more likely that "padders" would pad, and "overloaders" would overload, on either system.	
Permits a larger number of courses to be taken during four years.	Permits a larger number of courses to be taken during the four years.
Comment. Not inherent in either system, but rather depends upon the policy that determines the number of units in the courses. See p.5 for discussion.	
Practice teaching arrangements are more convenient.	Practice teaching arrangements are more convenient.
Comment. A difference of opinion about which this Committee is incompetent to form a judgment.	
The quarter system is more favorable for research, since more flexible arrangements may be made.	The semester system favors effectiveness in research.
Comment. No comment other than that this must depend to a large extent upon institutional practice in regard to teaching loads. If, as is usually maintained, the semester system saves faculty time, then the argument in favor of the semester system is to some extent valid.	
	Sabbatical leave for a semester at full pay is preferable to leave for only a quarter at full pay.
Comment. True from the viewpoint of a faculty member, but an adjustment could be worked out for the quarter system.	
	Sequential course offerings may be better integrated.
Comment. It is not clear what is behind this statement and our Committee is inclined to doubt its validity. Sequential offerings at Stanford in some Lower Division 3 quarter courses appear to be well integrated, e.g., The History of Western Civilization (History 10, 11, 12), Physical Sciences 1, 2, 3, and General Biology (Biology 1, 2, 3). Integration is a matter of planning and attitude rather than of a calendar.	
	Textbooks are designed generally for a semester course and hence fit semester courses better.
Comment. Of no general validity, since quarter courses may meet as often in a quarter as semester courses meet in a semester. This is probably based on unfamiliarity with the possibilities of the quarter system.	

Arguments for the Quarter System	Arguments for the Semester System
	The semester plan is better coordinated with the high schools and the majority of colleges and thus better adapted to the midyear admission of high school graduates and transfers from most colleges. (See statement by Rixford Snyder, Director of Admissions, Appendix B).
	Semesters are of equal length while quarters are more variable.
Comment. This is a common objection but probably not necessarily true. That the quarters need not vary as much as they often do seems to be indicated by the program at Ohio State (Table 8) and by the Cowley study at Ohio State in which a uniform calendar for ten years in advance was proposed. The Stanford quarters have, however, been rather variable in length (Table 8).	
	Administrative detail (registration, library, blue books, registration literature, time schedules, registrar's load) is reduced by one-third as is advising time and clerical work on the part of the faculty.
Comment. There is undoubtedly some saving in expense and time in the semester system, but the figure of one-third is probably high for it neglects to consider that all students would be taking more courses per term under the semester system as a rule. This would mean more work per student card at each period than on the quarter system. It also neglects to take into account either the need for additional laboratory and classroom space or the summer school. The other expenses unquestionably favor the semester system. See statements by Harvey Hall, Registrar, and Raynard C. Swank, Director of the Library, in Appendix B.	
	"Thus there must be genuine merit in the semester system or nearly three-fourths of our higher educational institutions would not be on the semester system."
Comment. A non sequitur.	

APPENDIX B

OPINIONS OF CERTAIN STANFORD ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS

The quotations below are the responses to request asking for a statement from each of the administrators who might be presumed to be directly affected by any change from the quarter to the semester system: The Registrar, Director of Admissions, Director of Libraries, Dean of Students, Dean of the Graduate Division, the Controller.

Letter from Dr. Harvey Hall, Registrar

"Thank you for inviting me to prepare a statement, from the viewpoint of the Registrar's Office, on the relative merits of the quarter system and the semester system. As I indicated to you when we were discussing this Committee, if there are any clearly discernible educational advantages of one of these systems over the other, then I believe the question should be settled on these grounds. I have some opinions on this, but it seems to me that these opinions would be out of place here since there are many others more competent than I to comment on the advantages of one system over the other from the standpoint of instruction and learning. I shall try to confine my remarks to the administrative aspects of the problem as they impinge on the Registrar's Office.

"From the point of view of this office the semester system is clearly advantageous. I shall assume here that the summer session will be approximately the same, from the standpoint of time and cost, under the semester system as it is now under the quarter system (since we are currently operating with one week programs, two week programs, eight week programs, and eleven week programs, it is difficult to see how it could be more complex than it is now). With the summer term regarded as a constant factor under either system we can simply compare two semester registrations under that system as against three quarterly registrations in an academic year under our existing system. Several advantages are immediately apparent:

"1. The cost of supplies could be reduced. The cost of registration books for a winter quarter is about $700. The cost of Time Schedules for a winter quarter is $1,118. With a clear saving of these two major items I think it can be estimated that the overall saving on expendible supplies alone would be approximately $2,500 per year.

"2. A saving in personnel could be effected. Our temporary registration day payroll for a winter quarter is approximately $500. We could reduce the staff in the Recorder's Office possibly by one and a half persons. I would estimate that the saving on personnel would be at least $4,000 a year.

"3. We are continually confronted with deadlines in this office. Preregistration comes three weeks before the end of a quarter and then final examinations and grade recording are immediately upon us. Thereafter we immediately prepare for the ensuing quarter's registration. At the end of the first two weeks we consider programs fixed and we start preparation for mid-term report sheets. We just barely have time to do this and get the mid-term report sheets into the hands of the instructors who return them to us in about two or three days' time having ascertained the correctness of the names thereon and having indicated those who are doing unsatisfactory work. "Smoke-ups" are immediately sent to students and then it is time for pre-registration and the cycle repeats. The fact that these deadlines would not come quite so frequently under the semester system would enable us to furnish better service to faculty and students and would relieve the tension caused

Letter from Dr. Harvey Hall, Registrar (Cont'd.)

"by the pressing time factor under which we are constantly working.

"4. More time would enable us to perform our tasks with a higher level of accuracy.

"5. Under the two registrations of the semester system less faculty and student time would be devoted to the mechanics of program planning and registering. My own hope here is that this would not mean that students would see less of their advisers, but that they would devote more time to long range planning and discussion of objectives.

"While all the advantages from the standpoint of this office, it seems to me, are on the side of the semester system, it should be mentioned that the problems involved in the change itself are great. Just the problems in converting students' records from quarter units to semester units and continuing to do so for those students who return will be quite a job (we have had two or three students during my brief term as Registrar who have returned to continue programs started while the student was on the semester system here in 1917). Revising all of our publications will constitute another formidable task. Still with all of this, from the standpoint of this office, the semester system, I think, would be advantageous.

"By way of conclusion I should like to point out to your committee that in the academic year 1916-17, which was the last year which Stanford operated on the semester system, the fall semester started on August 28 and final examinations ended on December 20. The spring semester started on January 8 and Commencement was held on May 21. If we are to adopt a semester program, I should like to recommend to your committee that some such schedule as this be given very serious consideration in order that the period between semesters be related to the Christmas recess. The anticlimax of two or three weeks of instruction plus a week of finals after Christmas should be avoided if possible."

Letter from Dr. Rixford K. Snyder, Director of Admissions

"From the point of view of admissions I think the quarter system has several disadvantages for Stanford. In their order of importance I would list them as follows:

"1. Most of our transfer applications are enrolled in institutions on the semester system. This makes it difficult for them to transfer at any time other than in the fall. If they were interested in enrolling at the beginning of Winter Quarter they would have to drop out of the previous school before the semester's end and thus lose credit. During my five years in the admissions office no student has been willing to do this. If they transfer for Spring Quarter they have to remain out of school for two months between the end of the first semester and the beginning of our third quarter. Very few applicants are this anxious to attend Stanford. With the anticipated growth of enrollment in junior colleges in the next decade this problem will be enhanced and it is my understanding Stanford will want to encourage junior college transfers in the coming years.

"2. High schools in most metropolitan areas have mid-year graduations and Stanford is able to accept virtually none of these as freshmen for the same reason as described in 1. This is not too serious from the point of view of the Freshman Class, but it becomes significant when they enroll in other colleges at mid-term and then desire to transfer to Stanford.

Letter from Dr. Rixford K. Snyder, Director of Admissions (Cont'd.)

"3. Because of the difference in calendars and terminology we in the admissions office have some difficulty explaining to prospective candidates the difference between quarters and semesters, semester units and quarter units, and the reasons for different terminal dates for a vacation, etc. This problem is largely a subjective one but with considerable nuisance value. I would think it might deter a few from applying because of the uncertainty that misunderstanding inevitably creates.

"Regarding your other query, I can see no serious disadvantage from the point of view of admissions in having the autumn term begin in late August and end just before Christmas. There is one problem that indirectly involves admissions that I might suggest, however, and that is the summer cruise and the summer camps which our NROTC and ROTC students have to attend. I think that they generally end around September 10. Speaking as Faculty Athletic Representative, and with no reference to the Admissions Office, it might be well to have our student body return at the same time our football teams do! It would seem to me that this would tend to de-emphasize the importance of football in the minds of the students and would be all to the good."

Letter from Dr. R. C. Swank, Director of Libraries

"I have discussed your letter of February 21 with the division heads of the University Libraries, and wish to report that this entire group enthusiastically favors a change from the quarter to the semester system. Such a change would benefit the Library program in one important way: it would reduce the number of times that a large number of routine Library operations would have to be performed during each year. These are the operations that occur at the end of the quarter or the beginning of a new quarter--placing books on reserve, issuing library privilege cards, following up on fines and other delinquencies, renewing faculty and graduate student loans, and the like. In general, my staff feels that the potential savings to the Library would be substantial."

Telephone conversation with Dr. E. R. Hilgard, Dean of the Graduate Division

Dean Hilgard favors a shift to the semester system for two reasons. There would be a saving in clerical work and in the steps required for administering Fellowships and Scholarships. A change would require a thorough reexamination of the curriculum and this shaking-up would in itself be desirable.

Letter from Mr. D. I. McFadden, Controller

"You have asked me to consider whether the adoption of the semester system would result in substantial reduction in the expenses of operating my office. There would be many little savings but the aggregate would not be substantial.

"For the record, there are four areas in which savings would occur. They are:

"1. Registration Day fee collection.
2. Room and board and tuition deferrals.
3. Scholarship checks.
4. Quarterly payroll appointments.

"We budget $500 extra help for Registration Day fee collections for our four quarters. About $150 would be saved if a quarter were eliminated. This is the only

Letter from Mr. D. I. McFadden, Controller (Cont'd.)

"cash saving to which I can point. The main job of collecting tuition fees is done by regular staff who drop normal activity for that day. I would judge that about $500 worth of their time is devoted to each registration day, and this saving would be available for their regular work.

"Students may defer tuition fees or room and board and pay them later at our cashier's office. Accounts are kept by our student account section. Were the students now deferring to defer one less time per year, there would be a material saving in the activity of these sections. This saving is very difficult to measure; however, because the number of deferrals has been increasing from year to year, the adoption of a higher semester fee could be expected to markedly increase the number who now defer. The increased number deferring would not quite use up the saving of going to the semester basis, but it is difficult for me to weigh these factors.

"We would draw scholarship checks one less time per year. This would effect a minor clerical saving.

"We now get quarterly appointments for instructors and teaching assistants four times a year. I assume that on a semester basis we would get them three times a year, so that we would save some effort in our Budget Section, Payroll Section and Tabulating Section. Again, the saving is not of great moment."

Letter from Dr. H. Donald Winbigler, Dean of Students - May 25, 1955

"There is no consensus among members of the Staff of the Dean of Students Office regarding the advisability of our changing to the semester plan. Since I think you already have statements from the Registrar and the Director of Admissions, I am here summarizing my own views.

"It appears to me that the chief advantages of the semester system are the following:

"1. There are many courses for which the semester plan is pedagogically preferable in that the fifteen-week term allows more time for maturation than the ten-week term.

"2. The semester plan affords less opportunity for an undesirable segmentation of subject matter, therefore, in many areas, encourages a sense of continuity.

"3. The semester plan is more economical in that it requires less time, on the part of faculty and staff, for such processes as registration, recording of grades, and student advisement.

"4. Since the majority of colleges and universities throughout the country are on the semester system, our adopting the semester plan would facilitate transfer at an advanced level.

"The relative advantages of the quarter system over the semester system appear to me to be the following:

"1. I believe there is a substantial amount of our subject matter which is more effectively dealt with in a ten-week course of larger unit value than in a fifteen-week course of lesser unit value.

Letter from Dr. H. Donald Winbigler, Dean of Students - 5/25/55 (Cont'd.)

"2. The quarter system is more economical of student and faculty time in that it permits holidays to coincide with periods between quarters. I have both studied and taught under the semester plan and have been impressed with the amount of spinning of wheels after Christmas and Easter vacations. This, in my opinion, destroys the added continuity which the semester plan is supposed to offer.

"3. The added flexibility of the quarter calendar is a definite advantage to many individual students. For those whose education has been interrupted by Military Service and who cannot control the date of their release, it is advantageous to have four times a year when they can resume their studies rather than three. For those who, because of illness or other emergencies, have to drop out of school within a term, the loss is less on the quarter system than on a semester system. For outstanding students, acceleration is easier under the quarter system than under the semester system.

"4. It is easier to relate the summer term to the regular academic year in the quarter system than under the semester plan. I realize that this is a debatable point since the summer term is no longer precisely a regular quarter. However, in many respects, it still serves as a regular quarter. As one example, I cite the so-called Summer-Winter Program for Freshman Women. Under this plan, a student may complete a regular freshman year of work by attending summer, winter and spring quarters. Although there are some disadvantages to the plan, I feel certain that it is wise for us to continue it because it is advantageous both to the University and the students involved. It would scarcely be feasible under the semester plan.

"5. The quarter plan which permits holidays to fall between quarters permits us to offer better grade-reporting service than would be probable under the semester plan. Only if a full week (with two weekends) were allowed between semesters would we be able to record and report grades for the first semester before the beginning of classes for the second semester. It seems to me desirable neither to introduce a third holiday period nor to put ourselves in the position of having to start a second semester without having grades for the first semester.

"In favor of a change from one system to the other, I have heard it argued that this would give us a golden opportunity to shake up our entire curriculum and improve our course sequences. While it is certainly true that a change would offer such an opportunity, I am not convinced that a change would achieve that result. Furthermore, I think the result could better be achieved by a frontal attack on the problem rather than by this indirect attack.

"Another feature of the possible change would be its impact upon our system 'the quarter off'. Not knowing what is proposed as a substitute, I will not try to comment on it.

"As a final consideration, I submit that the calendar of the University is deeply imbedded in our regulations, customs, procedures and publications. A change to the semester system would inevitably involve a heavy expenditure of time and money. Because of the many ramifications involved, it would be very difficult to estimate this cost with any degree of accuracy.

Letter from Dr. H. Donald Winbigler, Dean of Students - 5/25/55 (Cont'd.)

"My conclusion is that in order to justify this expenditure of time and money, we should be reasonably sure that the advantages to the University in changing to the semester plan would be real and substantial. With due respect to my colleagues who think otherwise, I doubt that they are."

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